

Relationship of Optimism with Academic Achievement and Self-Esteem among University Students in Pakistan

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Abstract: The emergence of positive psychology has been a comparatively new perspective yet it has helped many to change the focus from the disease, pain and negative aspects of life to more on happiness, success and positive aspects of life. The purpose of this research study was to examine the relationship of optimism, academic achievement and self-esteem. Through random sampling, 300 students were selected from one of the private universities in Pakistan. In order to measure the variables, Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R), Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSES) along with the Demographic Form were used. Correlation research design was used. The data that was collected through random sampling was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Coefficient of Correlation. According to this research study, significant relationship was found across self-esteem and academic achievement, whereas the relationship between optimism and self-esteem and academic achievement was not significant. Results were discussed in light of previous researches. It was found that people who belong to individualistic culture are more optimistic than collectivistic culture.

Keywords: Optimism, Academic Achievement, Self-Esteem, Pakistan

1. Introduction

After World War II, the only focus of the psychology was to treat ailments and mental disorders. It stopped focusing on the strengths of the people. Seligman brought the concept of optimism and explained that, while focusing on the weaknesses of the person, the strength and the potential is ignored (Pluskota, 2014). The positive psychology focuses more on the mental health and happiness rather than diseases and disorders. With the emergence of this subject, it was found that mind possesses the ability to cure many diseases. This is only possible, if mind is nurtured with positive thoughts (Joseph & Linley, 2006). Optimism is defined as having positive expectations in every situation (Scheier & Carver, 1993). The concept of optimism is found to be beneficial in every aspect of life. A positive correlation has been reported between academic achievement and optimism (Bressler & Bressler, 2010). Academic achievement is defined as achievement of a student in school, college or university. It can be in form of scores or CGPA (Singh & Jha, 2013). In academic achievement, along with optimism, high self-esteem is another variable found to have relevance. It was reported that students who possess high self-esteem set high goals, show perseverance at the time of failure and do not let themselves indulge in self-doubts. Previous researches concluded that people who have low self-esteem suffered from physical as well as

mental health problems (Ames, Rawana, Gentile, & Morgan, 2013). High self-esteem along with optimism and can serve as buffer from mental and physical health problems.

Rosenberg (1965) defined self-esteem as one's favorable or unfavorable attitude toward one's self. The self-esteem includes both cognitive and emotional element. What does a person think about himself? This includes cognition and it gives rises to feelings within a person. According to a study, a link was ascertained between self-esteem, academic achievement and optimism (Fernández-González, González-Hernández & Trianes-Torres, 2015) in undergraduate students and optimistic approach towards life (Gallagher, Lopez & Pressman, 2013) which influences one's psychological well-being. Considering the importance of optimism, more work has been done on optimism over the years. It was found that optimistic students, harbor positive perception towards any stressful situation and they remain hopeful that they will pass through hard times of their life (Forgeard & Seligman, 2012; Yıldırım, Karaca, Cangur, Acikgoz & Akkus, 2017). Some researchers contend that if, happiness, hope and optimism are features of one's personality then, ultimately it also has positive impact on one's self-esteem (Besser & Zeigler-Hill, 2014; Morton, Mergler & Boman, 2014). Constructive humor, social connection (Bibi & Karim, 2017; Ford, Lappi & Holden, 2016), optimism and self-esteem are the protective factors that can help the person from getting depressed (Ames, Rawana, Gentile, & Morgan, 2013; Ford, Lappi & Holden, 2016; Stamp et al., 2015).

There is a lot of research done which highlights the importance of optimism and high self-esteem, the work of many was driven towards understanding and predicting the outcome of the student's academic achievement and how this knowledge could be used for the benefit for the student body. The connection between self-esteem and optimism was given by Smokowski et al. (2013). Moreover, it had been found that mindfulness (Stupnisky, Perry, Renaud & Hladkyj, 2013; Zimmaro et al., 2016), gratitude and self-compassion (Shapira and Mongrain, 2014), positive parenting style (Aydin, Sari & Sahin, 2014; Raboteg-Saric & Sakic, 2013; Orejudo, Puyuelo, Fernandez-Terado & Ramos, 2012), role of school (Bum & Jeon, 2016) and role of teachers (Park & Peterson, 2008; Yahyaei, Foroushani & Mahini, 2012) are ways of making the person optimistic. Also, all of these ways are linked with high self-esteem and they ensure good mental health. It had been found that, athletes enhance their self-esteem by saying positive and encouraging statements towards themselves (Mousa, Rami & Abdu, 2014).

Furthermore, a lot of research has been dedicated to understand, how the optimistic differ from the pessimistic people? It was suggested that, in a difficult situation, optimistic people think and apply strategies to solve the problem, whereas, pessimists focus on their emotions. It was also found that optimistic athletes play with hope to get victory rather than fear of defeat (Lipowski, 2012). Optimism also strengthens immune system which improves well-being of a person (FDA Consumer 2002; Kamran, 2014). Unlike, pessimistic people, optimistic people think that, the difficult time they are facing is temporary and relate it with the situation (Bibi & Karim, 2017; Carver, Scheier and Segerstrom, 2010).

In a recent study it was found that men scored higher on self-efficacy and mental health than women and high self-efficacy was found related with better mental health and happiness (Abdul-Khalik & Lester, 2017; Puskar et. al., 2010). The low self- esteem of women was found to be linked with male dominant culture.

This study mainly discussed the variables, optimism and self-esteem with regard to culture. While considering the culture, it was found that there has been variation in the levels of optimism across different cultures. It was found that Asians were more optimistic than Caucasians. For Chinese, optimism is to accept the things as they are, rather than expecting good in future. Similarly, individualistic culture was found to be more optimistic than collectivistic culture. In the individualistic culture, optimism and high self-esteem are found to be linked with happiness whereas in collectivistic culture, conformity, respect and obedience are given importance than one's own personal interests (Falak, Heine, Yuki & Takemura, 2009; Fischer & Chalmers, 2008; Heine et al., 1999; Tamis-Lemonda, Way, Hughes, Yoshikawa, Kalman, & Niwa, 2007).

Whereas, Japan follows the collectivistic culture where self-esteem is considered high in following and fulfilling what others say rather than what individual thinks or prefers (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Smokowski, Evans, Cotter & Webber, 2013; Wang & Ollendick, 2001). The research done on Japanese can be related to Pakistan as it also follows the same (collectivistic) culture. Pakistan follows a culture where everyone will laud the person who is obeying others' opinions while ignoring their own. As culture difference impacts the scores on self-esteem, similarly it also affects the optimism. According to a study, conducted by Antonczyk and Salzman (2014), it has repeatedly been documented that people rooted in individualistic culture manifest more optimism and confidence in comparison to those in collectivistic culture. The main aim of the researchers for the current study was to find the relationship of optimism with self-esteem and academic achievement in a collectivistic culture.

Objectives

1. To ascertain the relationship of optimism, self-esteem and academic achievement.
2. To ascertain how one variable could predict the other variable.
3. To determine difference of main variables across gender.

Hypotheses

Considering the previous researches, the hypotheses for this study are as follows:

H₁: High optimism will have a significant relation with high academic achievement among university students.

H₂: High optimism will have significant relation with high self-esteem among university students.

2. Method

The purpose of conducting this research was to find the relationship of optimism, academic achievement and self-esteem. This research study has been designed in the light of previous researches which stated the significant relation among all these variables. This section includes the following:

Research Design

Correlation research was used for studying the relationship of optimism with academic achievement and self-esteem among university students. Based on the review of the literature, correlation design was

deemed a good fit for the current study. It is a research design which helps in determining the relationship between variables in any given study.

Sample

The sample size was selected on the basis of previous literature which was done with the same variables as the variables of this study. Aydin, Sari and Şahin (2014) conducted research on 297 undergraduate students to find their relationship across parental involvement, self-esteem, hope and academic achievement. Similarly, another study was conducted by Ames, Rawana, Gentile and Morgan (2013) on 283 students to find the beneficial role of having high self-esteem being optimistic on depression. The sample of this study consisted of 300 university students who were selected from non-government/non state university. The population comprised of all male and female students of Baccalaureate program (freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors). There were 43 % males and 57% females who became part of this research. Out of these, there were 22.7% freshman, 29% sophomore, 20.3% junior and 28% senior. Thus, every student had an equal chance of being selected for this study.

Sample Strategy

Data was collected by using random sampling which included all university students. Random sampling is a probability sampling and all the students will have equal chance to be a part of the study.

Measures

Demographic Form

A self-constructed demographic form was administered to gather demographic information regarding age, gender, study year, birth order and CGPA.

Revised Life Orientation Test (LOT-R)

LOT-R is a questionnaire consisted of ten items, constructed by Scheier, Carver, and Bridges (1994). Out of these items, three items measure optimism, three measure pessimism and four items act as fillers. Each item has four options scale called Likert scale. Its internal consistency is $\alpha = 0.80$.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)

Self-esteem is a measure which is used to measure general feelings of a person towards himself without indicating the specific trait. It consists of 10 items where 5 items measure the positive orientation towards oneself and remaining 5 items measure the negative worth of oneself. Each item consists of 4 options which begin from strongly agree and end at strongly disagree. The internal consistency was found greater than 0.70.

Academic Achievement

Academic achievement of the participants was assessed by recording their CGPA.

Procedure

The procedure includes the details of how the proposal of research was approved which was followed by contacting the participants and getting the data. First task was writing the proposal under supervision of the supervisors, which was followed by the presentation of those proposed topics. The research proposals were presented to Board of Studies and then to Institutional review Board for Ethical Consideration. After receiving the approbation by these two governing bodies, the practical part (administration of questionnaires) of the research was conducted. Second task was the collection of data. The researcher selected buildings of the university to gather the data from the students. Two days were scheduled for each building for two hours each day. Every second passing student from the gate of the building was contacted. The participant was told about the department of the researcher and the purpose of conducting research. Those who had time and agreed to participate in the study were given further details. They were explained that their filled data would be kept confidential and they were asked neither to write their names nor roll numbers. Rather their response forms were numbered so that anonymity can be maintained. They were also informed about their right of leaving at any time.

After giving all the required information the third task was to present them with questionnaires to solve them. The tests that were administered were; demographic form, Revised Life Orientation Test (LOT-R) and Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSES). One time approach to participants was done. Filling up of the questionnaires took 10 to 15 minutes approximately. As the participants returned the questionnaires the tests were given a quick look to check if any item or question was missed. If it was missed then participant was requested to fill it. In the case, if the item could not be filled that item was discarded. The fourth task was to submit the filled forms to supervisor's office so that filled data of the participants would remain secure. After collecting the data from the students the last task was to enter the data into SPSS.

Ethical Consideration

While doing the research, the quality and integrity of the study was ensured by International Review Board (IRB). The informed consent was taken. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants was ensured by the researchers. The participants did not write their names on the forms rather they were numbered to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. All the documents were kept in supervisor's office, in order to protect it completely. The physical and emotional safety of the research respondents was ensured completely. They were told that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. They were briefed and debriefed about the study.

Statistical Analyses

In order to analyze the data, a software called SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 22 was used. Relationship of optimism with academic achievement and self-esteem was checked by computing Pearson Product Moment Coefficient of Correlation. Descriptive analyses included means, standard deviation and percentages were presented.

3. Results

Optimism, academic achievement and self-esteem were studied in the current study. The result section is divided into two sections that are characteristics of sample and testing of main hypotheses. With regard to previous studies it was hypothesized that high optimism would have significant relation with optimism and also high optimism would have significant relation with high-self-esteem among university students.

Table 1: The frequency and percentage of the demographic variables (gender, birth order and level of education)

Variables	<i>f</i>	%
Gender		
Male	129	43
Female	171	57
Birth order		
First	95	31.7
Middle	118	39.3
Last	83	27.7
Only	4	1.3
Education		
Freshman	68	22.7
Sophomore	87	29.0
Junior	61	20.3
Senior	84	28.0
Total	300	100

The table above indicates that out of 300 participants, there were more females ($F=57\%$) than males and the mostly participants were middle born (39.3%) and sophomores (29%).

Table 2: The mean and standard deviation of age and CGPA (N=300)

Variables	M	SD
Age	20.7447	1.89709
CGPA	3.1593	0.492511

The table above indicates the stringed variables (age and CGPA) of the study. The mean age of the participants was 21 and the mean of their CGPA was 3.1593; whereas the standard deviation of age and CGPA of the students were 1.89709 and 0.49251 respectively.

Summary of the Characteristics of the Sample

There were 300 students who took part in the study. Out of the total three hundred research participants, there were more females than males and their mean age was 20.744. The respondents were mostly

middle born and were in sophomore year and the mean of their CGPA was 3.159. The two questionnaires that were administered to the people had ten questions each; whereas their internal consistency of LOT-R and RSES was found out to be 0.60 and 0.63 respectively.

Table 3: Means, standard deviation, t and p values of males and females across optimism, self-esteem and academic achievement

Variables	Groups	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's d
Optimism	Male	23.713	6.031	1.539	.171	NS
	Female	22.719	5.131	1.505		
Self-esteem	Male	15.883	2.082	.474	.417	NS
	Female	15.771	1.973	.471		
Academic-achievement	Male	3.054	.530	-3.249	.034**	0.374
	Female	3.238	.447	-3.173		

** $p < 0.05$

The table above delineates mean, SD, the value of *t*-test and values of *p* and Cohen's d. It clearly indicated that there was a difference between males and females across academic achievement. Cohen's d was run to calculate the difference between both the groups. However no significant difference was found between males and females across optimism and self-esteem and hence Cohen's d was not run on them.

Table 4: Pearson correlation across optimism, self-esteem and academic achievement

Variables	Optimism	Academic-Achievement	Self-esteem
Optimism	---	.063	.128
Academic-achievement	---	---	.027**
Self-esteem	---	---	---

** $p < 0.01$

It is indicated above in the table that Pearson correlation showed positively significant correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement, whereas non-significant relationship was found between optimism and academic achievement and optimism and self-esteem.

Table 5: Multiple regression analysis of optimism, self-esteem and academic-achievement (N=300)

Variables	B	SEB	B	<i>f</i>	<i>P</i>
Self-esteem	.029	.014	.119	2.06	.040**
Optimism	.009	.005	.091	1.68	.093

** $p < 0.05$

The table 5 above indicated that a significant model surfaced using enter method. It is indicated that self-esteem is positive predictor of academic achievement. However, optimism has not significant relationship with academic achievement. R value found to be 0.16 and R^2 found to be 0.2 for academic achievement.

3.1 Summary of Results

In the result section, descriptive and inferential statistics was done. Descriptive statistics, depict the percentage and frequency of three demographic variables; gender, birth order and education. There were in total 300 participants, there were more females (F=57%) than males (43%) and mostly participants were middle born (39.3%) and sophomores (29%). Descriptive statistics also included the mean and standard deviation of the stringed variables; which are age and standard deviation. The mean age and CGPA of the participants were 20.744 and 3.15 respectively.

There were two instruments used in this study; Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R) and Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSES). The Cronbach alpha was calculated. It was 0.60 and 0.63 respectively. In inferential statistics, *t*-test and Pearson correlation was done across optimism, self-esteem and academic-achievement. It also subsumed multiple regression analysis across self-esteem and optimism. The results revealed that the difference between males and females on the basis of academic achievement was significant. The outcome of Pearson Correlation found that positive correlation exists between self-esteem and academic achievement, whereas, relationship between optimism and academic achievement and optimism and self-esteem is not significant. Multiple regression analysis indicated that self-esteem is positive predictor of academic achievement. However, optimism has not significant relationship with academic achievement.

4. Discussion

This study subsumed three variables optimism, self-esteem and academic achievement. The need which incited to conduct research on optimism was because of the paucity of its awareness in developing countries such as Pakistan. As students are the future of every country so it was important to study the optimism, self-esteem and academic achievement with regard to the students. The optimism does not include only positive mindset in fact it is a mean of mental and physical well-being of the person. Moreover, it inculcates the coping skills in a person to deal with harsh situations (Mousa, Rami & Abdu, 2014). Optimism has been measured by using Life-Orientation Test Revised (LOT-R); a self-reporting scale consisting of 10 items and constructed by Scheier, Carver, and Bridges (1994). Optimism is found

to be linked with high academic achievement (Besser & Zeigler-Hill, 2014; Fernández-González, González-Hernández & Trianes-Torres, 2015). Academic achievement had been measured by recoding Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of the students which covered the overall performance of students. It was found that those who have high self-esteem are optimistic in nature and also keep good academic record (Defreitas, 2011). Self-esteem had been measured by using Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale consisting of 10 items (Hatcher & Lynne, 2009). To study the relationship of optimism with self-esteem and academic achievement, the students from the university were selected. The sample consisted of 300 students which were selected through random sampling. After receiving the approval from Board of Studies and Institutional review Board for Ethical Consideration, the research was conducted. Every participant was ensured about anonymity and confidentiality and their right to leave the study anytime. After getting their consent, the questionnaires were administered which were three in number. The questionnaires with unfilled items or missing data were discarded. The collection of data was followed by entering it in SPSS.

The results of this study manifested that the relationship found between optimism and self-esteem and optimism and academic achievement was not significant and the reason might be the cultural difference (Antonczyk & Salzmann, 2014). However, the relationship found between self-esteem and academic achievement was significant. Again, the reason behind the significant result might be due to culture. In collectivistic culture, people are interdependent and follow one another's advices and take their opinions. Here in Pakistan, as children remain with their parents for longer regardless of their age. As compare to fathers, mothers spend more time with their children and also assist them in their studies and give positive opinions regarding their abilities (Aydin, Sari, & Sahin, 2014).

5. Implications

From the research on topic 'relationship of optimism with academic achievement and self-esteem among university students, the significant relationship was found between self-esteem and academic achievement. The discussion on optimism and self-esteem by arranging workshops or meetings can be beneficial for students

6. Further Research

This research was done in a private university. This study can again be conducted by changing the sample size and sample strategy. It can be further conducted:

- At private and government universities
- To determine the relationship of optimism with different occupation
- To ascertain the relationship of optimism with different personalities

7. Conclusion

Pakistan is an underdeveloped country and it is the need of hour to boost its literacy rate. If the student's self-esteem is boosted either by the help of parents or teachers then their academic achievement would

be improved. It can also be looked in another way; improvement in their academic achievement will motivate them to study more as rewards in academic career would act as positive reinforcement.

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